

Lady of the Lake

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Summary: Convincing Thorin they would fare better with someone experienced in the land, Gandalf encourages him to hire a Man guide called Gilli Waters for the job. First problem: Gilli is not a Man. Second problem: Gilli is not a man.

Lady of the Lake

**Lady of the Lake:**

**Author:** xXTheAngelsHaveThePhoneboxXx, aka Nicky

**Rating:** Teen and up, but may increase to Mature, though it is unlikely.

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**Spoilers/Warning:** Book and movie canons are used in equal measure because the book has things the movies don't, and vice versa (like, for example, I can't NOT have that beautiful Carrock scene) â€" spoiler for the book and all three movies â€" past underage â€" past alcoholism â€" canon-typical violence â€" character death â€" AU canon divergence â€" weird Dwarf physiology/sex/gender, because as several authors pointed out: if one third of the populations is producing one to two children, three, tops, then the Dwarf race should be extinct â€" archaic views of gender roles in society â€" other tags will be added as they appear.

**Pairings:** [Thorin/OFC] (Original Female Character), other minor pairings.

_**Summary:** Convincing Thorin they would fare better with someone

"You go to work the next day pretending nothing happened. Your co-workers ask if everything's okay and you tell them you're just tired. And you're trying to smile. And they're trying to smile."

â€• Richard Siken

~(XVX\oOo/XVX)~

The dry chill of winter has never been kind to DÃ-s.

When they lived in Erebor her rooms were perhaps the warmest; certainly hotter than those of the rest of the Royal family. North as Erebor stood, their ancestors had developed a heating system that pumped boiled water through her stone like blood. The walls and floot were warm to the skin, chasing away the cold even through the longest nights, which perhaps was why she, Thorin, and Frerin had spent so many nights on it, cocooned in a nest of thick furs by the fire. Yet even the warm blanket that wrapped her chambers had not stopped the young Dam from draping herself in thick wool gowns which covered her neck to ankle and coaxing a few small flames from the coals in the hearth. The embers in her fireplace glowed red and orange in spite of the season.

Frerin less so, but even in the warm months of spring and summer the second son of ThrÃ;in dared the chill with hesitance. Certainly, Frerin was the first of the three to leap from cliffs into the water bellow; but DÃ-s could remember how her brother had screamed when he came up for air; how he would not stop shivering even in the lukewarm water of summer. Not, of course, that the coughing and stuffed nose had ever stopped him from scaling the rocks and flinging himself into the air once again, even if the cold sickened him much easier than it did their oldest brother. He favoured the same thick clothing as his sister once the weather gave a hint of autumn; and even with the fire alive all night the boy often found his way into his brother's room and into his bed. There had been many nights that the older of the Princes shared body heat with his golden haired brother and, once DÃ-s came into to the world, room was made for her between them as the two slowly migrated into her hot chambers.

Their settlement in Ered Luin had no such luxuries. It was with goose pimples on her arms and neck that Dis awoke to a cold hearth on the day she saw her brother away from the semblance of a home they had carved for themselves.

She had stood by Thorin as he tightened the girth of his saddle and double checked his packs, in a thick coat draped over her nightgown in the wee dark hours afore sunup. She stroke the young mare's thick pelt with her fingers, its oily dirt from many days going unwashed collecting underneath the Lady's manicured nails. When she turned to smooth down the front of his fur-lined coat, DÃ-s couldn't bring herself to look up at him as she spoke.

"Don't die," she whispered to him; in the kind of voice she used when they were in close proximity to her sleeping sons, so as not to wake the boys. "Don't leave me alone in this world." She had long forgotten much about Frerin; the sound of his laughter, the colour of his eyes (though logically she knew he had the same Durin blue as hers and Thorin's) the manner with which he carried himself, whether he held the quill in his right hand or his left. She could so well

picture every day spent with him, every one of his actions, but the figure in her mind, the boy she chased after with a stick or a ball of mud in her hand was. . . "Don't make me forget your face."

Frerin would have said to her all he thought. He would have reassured her that he would come back to her; swear that he would keep himself and her children safe. He would have promised that he would see her next dressed in the finest silks and polished gold and sapphires rather than the gowns she had pricked the skin off her right index finger sewing by her own hand. He would have told her, "You won't be alone: you will have the boys and you will have Dwalin, and Balin"and our people."

Thorin placed a hand on her shoulder and squeezed tight; she pressed her forehead to his, and her eyes were open. D s' hands rested firm on the back of his neck while she tried to commit the texture of his hair to memory. Between the two of them his hair was thinner than hers, and shorter, and greyer.

"Look after our people," he said to her, and he didn't say, "You have always been better at it than I," nor did he say, "Until I return."

"I still don't trust him," she said as he mounted his pony. If they were not Thorin and D s, King Regent and Crown Princess; if they were only a brother and a sister, she would have locked her fingers and he would have stepped into her hands to scale the height of the pony's back easier.

"None of us do," he said. He didn't say, "But I will not be the fool who says no to a Wizard."

D s hummed. "I suppose one can hardly trust a Man who is thirty moved ahead. Sometimes before they see the entire playing board." Especially when this particular Man was not a Man at all and held a sudden and peculiar interest in Erebor and her reclamation. Especially when he conceived a plan to take her from underneath the claws of a Firedrake and then proceeded to announce that circumstances may not allow him to accompany D s' brother and children all the way.

"Are you certain about this?" she asked again, looking up at her brother in the dark. Without the light of day illuminating his face he seemed younger. "You would fare well enough without a guide by you."

"It was you who had convinced me to look into the Man. That you now doubt your convictions is all things," he told her, "but comforting."

D s shook her head and maybe, if the circumstances were different, if he was only going away for a few moons to work and sent money back to her, she might have laughed and told him to watch it because he would get lost between three rocks without her.

She watched from the doorstep as he rode north into the early, black spring morning. She stayed there still, standing in the cold as black skies turned to dark blue, turned to navy, turned to dawn. The doorstep was where K li found her, bleary-eyed, dark hair sticking every which way it pleased, and complaining about not getting to see

Thorin off.

"You will see your Uncle in less than two moons," she said as she ushered him inside with a hand on his back.

"Why does Uncle have to leave more than a fortnight early? We are not going to get lost between here and Erebor; we don't need a guide. And Uncle certainly doesn't have to leave early just to meet him. He's the one that might get employed; if anything, he should be coming here, not Uncle Thorin thereâ€" aren't you supposed to do things for your clients, not the other way around? That's what all the Men we've ever traded with told us when we wouldn't lower the prices."

"Aye, because you are young and cannot understand that the heart of negotiation is that neither party is satisfied with what they get but it is better than nothing at all. Leave the conduct of business to more knowledgeable people until your studies are complete. Being able to tell north from south by the moss on the trees is well and good until there are no trees to look for moss on," she told him, trying to comb out some of his hair with her fingers. He ducked away from her hands with a whine and a grimace.

"Mama, I am not a boy anymore."

"I decide when you are not a boy anymore. Make yourself look like a civil Dwarf, and wake up Fā-li. Mahal knows he'll be lazying in bed for another quarter hour."

It was with these words that life in the Durin household, in a carved hole in the mountainside which had taken decades to build, began. With three people occupying a space made for four, the house was large and quiet. Even with Fā-li and Kā-li awake.

~(XVX\oOo/XVX)~

The days passed in a hurry. There was never a shortage of work; Lady Dā-s, daughter of Darā-s, never found herself idle when Thorin was in their village in Ered Luin, and even less so when the acting King without a crown of an exiled people without a home, was not. It was a common enough occurrence that Thorin would leave; once every seven or eight years, to find work that paid well with Men, as they always paid better for Dwarf-crafted goods. She herself had gone to neighboring villages of Men a little way east to trade her crafts, and as Fā-li and Kā-li grew they sometimes went out also, though never as far as she or Thorin.

Her workload did not increase overmuch when Thorin announced that he would be traveling east to the other side of the Misty Mountains, to Erebor. Dā-s was not sure whether it was a good thing. There were few left who could recall her home; her Mother's and Father's home. They had been forty thousand, most living within the Mountain but there was never a shortage of those who lived in Dale also. Their Mother spent most of her childhood under the sun, before she took up a career that led her to the Mountain and to their Father. Now the Dwarves of Erebor were less than eighteen thousand strong, and those numbers had slowly been decreasing over the decades.

Her own sons had grown up on only words of mouth and written texts and illustrations â€" some in books, others made by Frerin when he

lived. The most recent recount any of the Durins had of Erebor was from Dwalin when he travelled to the Iron Hills close to thirty years ago, and she could likely count on her hands the number of times her people had braved the east before him. For those who recalled the Drake the memory was too fresh " would always be " and for those born afterward there was less a drive to return to a place they had never been, between the stories told and the fact that they had families here, a hearth and home, husbands, wives, children.

That is not to say that Thorin had a shortage of volunteers. Many were Dwarves with nothing to lose, or those who had not seen true battle. Good hearts and good souls, and all equally ambitious. They missed home. Some approached her still about signing their names to the quest, insisting that they could help and she believed them, even if she refused them. Every pair of hands could be the difference between life and death in the wilds, this she learned on her own skin.

This quest, however, was not one for an army: thirteen good Dwarrows or thirteen thousand, if the Drake lived and awoke nothing would save them from the inferno. If the Drake had choked itself to death on that cursed gold and was decomposing all over her Grandfather's floor, then her brother was in for a pungent surprise and many a day of cleaning dung and broken body parts with all of twelve pairs of hands at his side.

Nay, this quest was a heist. A secret. A quiet thought to go with a quiet deed, and both she and Thorin knew the other Dwarf Lords would agree. It was worth trying for, but it was doubtful they would give an army to Thorin if there was no guarantee of at least partial success: they swore allegiance, aye, but one's own people came first always. They would need much faith and a precious rock that gave her Grandfather mad beliefs of grandeur and slowly drove him out of his sound mind. Thorin would try, but in her bones D s knew the request for soldiers would not hold without a great enough cause and so much at risk.

It was with this on her mind and heaviness in her heart that Lady D s, daughter of Dar s, watched as her sons packed their lives into the back of a merchants' cart close to a moon's turn after she said farewell to her last living brother.

K li sat crouched in its bed, bent over a pack, eyes darting as he counted in his head while his hands moved about inside the bag, mouthing the names of things to himself as he numbered them. D s drew her blue shawl tighter around her shoulders and wished not for the first time that they were alone and she did not have to be Lady D s; only Mother.

Her youngest boy snapped the flap of the pack shut and fastened it even as he nodded to himself. As he stood and dropped from the cart to the ground it struck her how much Durin there was in him. She had little more than word of mouth to go by when it was said that Thorin was the picture of his father, for this she could hardly recall also, but her younger boy was the image of her and Thorin. That K li had more Durin in his featured than he did his father was something that drew rumours when they were all younger. It was his eyes that gave away K li's blood in him; brown as dirt on a riverbank, only a very few shades lighter than his hair. His face and built he shared with her and Thorin.

He moved around the cart to join his brother, who stood by one of the ponies, shoes barely gracing the dirt. She could recall a time when her boy looked underneath her skirts to see if her feet really did have wheels, and was disappointed to find that no, his mother simply had a Lady's grace. It was he now that moved like a feline, swift and quiet. Hunter's feet. He had chased so many cats in his childhood, learning from them, trying to move as gracefully and silently, repeating to himself time and again that to catch a cat he had to be a cat.

He probed Fǎ-li in the side, then called out, "Dead," and chastised him from not paying close attention to his surroundings.

"Next time I will have a knife in my hand, and then you can explain to Mother why your fingers are lying at your feet," Fǎ-li said to his brother.

"You would have to be faster than a two hundred and thirty year old for that to happen."

"I'll show you fast," Fǎ-li snapped, and it was only a short scuffle before he had his brother on one knee, in a choke hold and with one arm wrenched at a dangerous angle behind his back. "Yield," he said, but Kǎ-li shook his head, grinning mad.

"Never on your life," he proclaimed.

"Fǎ-li, Kǎ-li," Dǎ-s snapped, and the two Princess straightened at once, brushing off their clothes halfheartedly.

"He started it, Ma," they said in unison, pointing fingers at one another.

"I don't care who started it," she said, coming closer. "I am finishing it, before you can embarrass yourselves further. Are you certain you have everything packed? A spare skin? Your flint boxes?"

"Yes, Ma. And our thicker cloaks, and the dried fruits you told us to purchase, and all of the other fifty things you had us make a list of. I double checked," Kǎ-li said, "and then I double checked the double check." Dǎ-s shot him a warning look but nodded. He dropped his head and muttered a muffled apology.

If they had been anyone else but the Crown Princes and the heirs to the Durin throne, she might have fussed over the state of his hair, unbound and unkempt from the short struggle he had had with his brother. She might have combed it out with her fingers and braided it up away from his eyes. She might have kissed his face and crushed him and his brother both to her chest and not let go for a long time.

Her sons, her little boys, stood by a merchants' cart, gold hair and brown so dark it was nearly black, swords and arrows at their backs, and the only thing she had to ask of them was, "Come back to me." Dǎ-s wasn't sure which hurt more: that this was as she had stood with her brothers so many decades ago and asked the same thing but only Thorin returned, or that she was saying those same words now to her own children. Dǎ-s could not recall Frerin's face, but she did

remember standing between them, the lads in their armour and braids and looking every bit the Princes they were for the first time in too long, and making them swear that she would see them again.

Thorin and Frerin, and now FÃ-li and KÃ-li. Suddenly her eyes were stinging.

"Mama," FÃ-li said, and when he looked at her like that, with eyes so much like hers, she found a part of her hated Thorin. She couldn't press her boy to her chest as she so wanted to, nor could she cry, but she could tell him to watch over his brother, to always keep KÃ-li safe because it was his job.

"Watch over little KÃ-li, FÃ-li," she had said to him, as she had so very often in his life. "Look after your little brother." It was the first thing she told him on her birthing bed when she placed her newborn second son in his arms.

She touched her forehead to his and took her time to pull away and look at him, brushed a phantom stray hair from his face, cupped his cheek. The smile she smiled not really a smile.

"Next time I see you, we will be dressed in gold no Dwarf has touched in one hundred and seventy one years," he told her, "And you will have the finest hair pieces and necklaces and chains in all of Middle-earth," FÃ-li said as he toyed with the beads she wore about her neck. "You'll never have to work again, or sell your crafts for half price or sacrifice purchasing a new gown to get more food for the winter again. I promise, Ma."

"Just promise to be safe."

"We will be. Uncle won't let anything happen to us, no matter how much we annoy him." It was meant as a joke, a jest, but she didn't find it in her heart to smile.

"Take care of each other," she bid. "Don't rely on anyone else to do it for you, not even Thorin: he might not be able to." That he might not be there anymore to protect them was not said, but she couldn't say that to her sons even if she needed to. She trusted Thorin with their livesâ€"she trusted him less so with his own, damn his hero complex.

She looked at her second son next, and again was stricken by how alike Thorin he was in face. The bow he had slung across his back was of his own making. His first bow, the one he trained with for many years, the one that belonged to Frerin when he lived, was left in his room, in a decoratively carved mahogany case.

She pressed her labradorite stone into his palm as she held his hands, and it was the most she could afford here in public, saying farewell for the second time that day. This was formality; their hearts had spoken their last words back in the house, away from prying eyes. And yet, it was not enough.

"Don't let each other out of your sight," she ordered, and again she was not sure whether it hurt more that she had spoken those words to Thorin and Frerin, and only one came back because they didn't listen, or that she said them to her children now. "Return to me."

Another King on another mad quest to take back another homeland. How have they wronged to deserve a history that repeated itself so?

She held KÃ-li's hands tight and made him promise to stay with FÃ-li and do what FÃ-li told him and not cause their Uncle trouble or he would send them back here.

"We will be Dwarrows grown when we see each other again. You will be proud of us, Ma."

"I am always proud of you," she said, and she didn't say, "Don't be in such a hurry to grow up," nor did she say, "There is little pleasure in being a Dwarfrow grown."

"I wish you'd come with us, Ma," KÃ-li said. "This quest would go over easy if you were there. You can shame an Orc into a corner with just the Durin Glare, let alone when you start talkingâ€"it was a compliment, I swear!" he blurted when she turned the 'Durin Glare' on him. "See? Right there. That's what I'm talking about. You do it better than even Uncle. And nobody does it better than Uncle," he said, nodding.

"And who, do you imagine, will be taking care of the settlement if I went?"

"Someone who deserves to sit in a council meeting and listen to the nobles whine and cry and piss on each other's shoes. . . What? You can't deny it if it's true. They can sit here and you can be a decorated hero of Erebor."

"I already am. Raised the two of you, had I not?" she paused, then said, "Take care of one another. Don't talk to strangers. Listen to Thorin, and don't wander far from the rest of the Company."

"Maâ€" "

"I'm speaking," she snapped. "I am very serious about this. I remember what happened the first time you left here with Thorin and Dwalin. Stay close, and stay safe, and next I see you I expect a complete report. Am I understood?"

"Yes, Ma," her boys agreed in unison.

Her thick gown did not protect her from the sharp cold winds that blew as she waved her sons farewell.

They sat among several merchants in the back of a pony-drawn wagon, legs dangling over the side as it rocked over uneven terrain, and waved until they were out of sight. When Thorin and Frerin left with her grandfather she ran after their ponies, matching their pace for long before she tired and had to stop; but she was not the only child running after her family anymore. She was Lady DÃ-s now, and she could afford only to stand and watch.

So stand she did, long after after they had disappeared from her sights, shawl providing no shelter from the cold of the morning. The sun was well into rising when she went back inside the house they have carved out for themselves; Dwarrows and Dams pressed their fists to their hearts as she walked by. The house was not large, but it was

large enough, and certainly bigger than those of other, less popular folk, but like every house, it had a kitchen table and a hearth and a bed and family, and that was enough.

The house had slowly, without her allowing it, begun to feel like home. It was where she brought her husband when they wed, and where she and he made two beautiful children. It was where Thorin came back to. In the sitting room was the fireplace that melted the snow from his clothes. In the kitchen stood the table where her brother and youngest son skinned and cleaned the first game Kã-li shot down (and needless to say she was not pleased in the least with the bloodied mess they made). The first door to the right in the hall was hers, and across from that was her children's, and it was where she nursed them to health and sang them to sleep. On the oval carpet underneath the fireplace was where she laid out furs, and she and Thorin read stories to her boys on the long nights. It was not Erebor. It was not home. But it was close; it was good, and safe, and it was where she and her children grew up.

It was a short time later that she discovered her boys had forgotten their oilskins, still hanging in their wardrobe, and quietly, with only the walls to bare witness, Dã-s began to cry.

~(XVX\oOo/XVX)~

**Other Additional Notes:** When this chapter began I intended to stick some plot into it. Honest. In fact it wasn't even going to be from Dã-s' POV, but it got away from me and all we got was the last time (canonically) that a mother had seen her children before they went off to fight a dragon and died trying to protect their Uncle (book canon). Well, to my credit I did squeeze in a little plot. A build up to a plot. A hint at a character involved in the plot development.

Yes, Kã-li's rune stone is indeed labradorite. I thought it was malachite in the film because it looked green, but a quick Google search revealed I was mistaken.

Title is in Greek (massive thank you for the accurate translations to a good friend of mine), meaning Lady of the Lake. It is unrelated to the Arthurian legend. The title is in Greek for reasons of which I will tell to you another, less spoiler-y time.

Anyway, I hope you guys liked it, and I will see you all next time :))

End
file.